

Patriotic Correctness and other attacks on Academic Freedom

A Report by John K. Wilson

The Patriot Act isn't just a theoretical danger to civil liberties. Just ask Muslim scholar Tariq Ramadan, who was hired by Notre Dame University's Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies to teach this fall. But the US government revoked Ramadan's work visa in July (after approving it in May) before he could come to America.

Section 411 of the Patriot Act allows the government to ban anyone who has "used his position of prominence within any country to endorse or espouse terrorist activity ... in a way that the Secretary of State has determined undermines United States efforts to reduce or eliminate terrorist activities." The government does not offer an explanation for why Ramadan was banned from the country.

Ramadan wrote in the *Chicago Tribune*, "Anyone who has read any of my 20 books, 700 articles or listened to any of my 170 audio-taped lectures will discern a consistent message: The very moment Muslims and their fellow citizens realize that being a Muslim and being American or European are not mutually exclusive, they will enrich their societies."

The Network for Education and Academic Rights issued an academic freedom alert for the United States, the fifth time the US government has been cited internationally for violating academic freedom since January 2002.

A visa is not simply a license to enter the United States; it is also a license to stay in the US. International scholars and students in the US are all subject to having their visa revoked at any time under this provision of the Patriot Act, without any reason being given. And unlike some immigrants who can participate in the underground economy and stay in the US after losing their visa, it is impossible for a scholar targeted by the US government to remain in this country and do academic work.

While any violation of academic freedom is a serious matter, the Ramadan case is the only one that directly impacts thousands of scholars and students at colleges across the country. The Ramadan case also reveals the rising power of conservative advocacy groups within the Bush Administration, which pushed for H.R. 3077 to establish an International Higher Education Advisory Board with broad investigative powers "to study, monitor, apprise, and evaluate" activities of area studies centers.

Part of the effort to ban Ramadan from the country was led by Daniel Pipes, an influential conservative who was appointed to the US Institute for Peace. Pipes runs www.campus-watch.org, and he assisted some French pro-Israel groups in lobbying the Bush Administration to exclude Ramadan after his visa was initially approved.

Pipes has repeatedly defended his website, which posted what it called "dossiers" on professors of Middle East Studies that it deemed too left-wing, on the grounds that he was simply criticizing these faculty, not infringing on their academic freedom. The Ramadan case shows that Pipes goes far beyond criticism to helping to coordinate attacks on academic freedom.

The danger is clear: under the Patriot Act, criticism of Israel is being categorized as support for terrorism, and serves as justification for revoking a visa. Yusof Islam, better known as Cat Stevens, was secretly put on a no-fly list and banned from the US, apparently because he donated money to Muslim charities that the US government thinks may be linked to terrorist organizations.

The growing right-wing network of classroom spies makes the Ramadan and Islam examples particularly dangerous. Websites like noindoctrination.org and studentsforacademicfreedom.org allow students to post anonymously attacks on their professors and what they say in class, without any verification of the accuracy of the comments.

Martin Kramer, one of the critics of Middle East Studies, has noted gleefully to Middle East scholars, "You are being watched. Those obscure articles in campus newspapers are now available on the Internet, and they will be harvested. Your syllabi, which you've also posted, will be scrutinized. Your websites will be visited late at night."

Foreigners at American universities must now literally watch what they say and write, for fear that it might lead to banishment.

Silencing Dissent on Campus

One of the most alarming trends of the past year has been the firing of faculty who criticize their institutions. Shared governance means little without the right of faculty to speak openly and critically.

Penn State Altoona: tenured theater professor Nona Gerard was accused of “grave misconduct” and dismissed for criticizing colleagues and programs in her department.

Academy of Art University: creative writing instructor Jan Richman was fired after a student wrote a story full of sex and violence, and was expelled.

Cumberland College: Robert Day, an assistant professor of social work, was fired for creating a website, *wecareforcumberland.com*, which called for financial and administrative reforms at the college.

Shaw University: a student was expelled from the dorms and a professor fired for circulating a petition critical of the university president.

College of the Ozarks: Jon Davis, an assistant professor of biology, was fired for revealing that an administrator had bought his doctorate from a diploma mill.

Benedict College: two professors were fired for refusing to follow a school policy requiring 60% of the grades for freshmen be based on effort. Benedict President David Swinton accused the professors of “insubordination.”

University of Southern Mississippi: two professors were summarily fired for investigating alleged resume inflation by a top administrator. In a settlement with the university, the professors are banned from criticizing the administration.

The Politics of Controversy on Campus

Bans on political speakers or requirements for “balance” create a dangerous atmosphere for academic freedom on campus. An effort to ban Michael Moore from campus does not silence Moore; but it certainly intimidates students and faculty who may want to express similar ideas and feel that they have been prohibited from campus. Lacking Moore’s outspokenness and celebrity status, these individuals are likely to remain silent.

Utah Valley State College: public outcry over a planned Oct. 20, 2004 speech on campus by Michael Moore led President William Sederburg (a former Republican state senator) to order student leaders to find a conservative speaker to “balance” Moore.

California State University at San Marcos: the president rescinded support for Moore’s speech, claiming that state law compelled the university not to pay for a speaker with strong political views. After protests, Moore’s speech was moved to a larger arena off campus and privately financed.

Yeshiva University: The Israel Club dis-invited Israeli Defense Forces refusnik Guy Grossman after the other speaker in a planned debate withdrew. Reportedly, the group was “under pressure from those who feared the consequences of giving an ‘open forum’ to a left-wing speaker.”

Bucknell University: general counsel Wayne Bromfield refused to allow Congressman Pat Toomey to give an April 8, 2004 speech on campus about “civic engagement” because of a policy banning political speakers. Ralph Nader, however, was paid to give the University’s commencement address because the event was scheduled before he announced plans to run for president. Toomey instead spoke nearby off-campus.

Calvin College: a student who listed an interest in gay rights in a Congressional internship application had his application sent to Barney Frank’s office, but an adviser at the college told the student not to do an internship in a “homosexual environment.” When David Halpern, program supervisor at the Washington Center for Internships and Academic Seminars, objected to reassigning the student based on the adviser’s beliefs, Halpern was fired the next day.

Le Moyne College: in fall 2003 refused to allow a speaker from Call to Action to talk on campus, claiming that a full dialogue required an opposing speaker.

University of California at Berkeley: three students, Rachel Odes, Michael Smith and Snehal Shingavi were found guilty of “disturbing the peace” for a peaceful anti-war sit-in at Sproul Hall’s front lobby. Although all criminal charges were dropped, the three students were selected for punishment by the university, not allowed to offer a defense for their actions, and convicted in absentia.

Forsyth Technical Community College: writing teacher Elizabeth Ito was fired for spending 10 minutes in a class criticizing the war in Iraq in Spring 2003, and refusing to promise never to mention the war in class again.

Drake University: A Nov. 15, 2003 Drake forum on “Stop the Occupation! Bring the Iowa Guard Home!” sponsored by the Drake chapter of the National Lawyers Guild included nonviolence training for activists. The next day, 12 protesters were arrested at an anti-war rally at Iowa National Guard headquarters in Johnston. Because of this, Drake University was ordered in a Feb. 4 2004 subpoena from an FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force to give up “all documents indicating the purpose and intended participants in the meeting, and all documents or recordings which would identify persons that actually attended the meeting” and any campus security records “reflecting any observations made of the Nov. 15, 2003, meeting, including any records of persons in charge or control of the meeting, and any records of attendees of the meeting.” Drake University was also ordered not to tell anyone about the subpoena. The subpoena was eventually dropped.

University of Texas at Austin: on Feb. 2, 2004, Army intelligence agents asked for information about people who attended a law school conference on about Islamic law and sexism. Army agents visited several campus offices seeking a list of those who attended and a videotape. The Army admitted that the visit overstepped its rules. “The special agents and their detachment commander exceeded their authority by requesting information about individuals who were not within the Army’s counterintelligence investigative jurisdiction.”